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WOMAN, AND HER PLACE
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Woman

WOMAN,

AND HER PLACE IN A FREE SOCIETY:

BY

EDWARD CARPENTER.

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WOMAN

WHAT a word is this! In its brief compass what thousand-year-long tragedies lie enshrined! Since the far-back time when in the early societies the thought of inequality had hardly arisen, and the female in her own way—as sole authenticator of birth and parentage, as guardian of the household, as inventress of agriculture and the peaceful arts, as priestess or prophetess or sharer in the councils of the tribe—was as powerful as man in his, and sometimes even more so; down to to-day, what centuries of suffering, of repression, of slave-hood, of dumbness and obscurity have been the lot of woman! It seems strange that with the growth of invention and production the status of the female sex should have tended to decline rather than to improve. Yet such has only too often been the case. For as the sentiment of private Property—the chief incentive to Civilisation—has from time to time risen and spread with a kind of contagion over the advancing races of mankind, the human male, bitten by the greed of

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individual ownership, and casting his eyes about to see what fresh acquisitions he could claim, has continually ended by enslaving and appropriating his own free mate, his second self, and reducing her also to a mere chattel, an exclusive possession and luxury, a minister to his wants and pleasures, and a toy and soul-less plaything.

With whatever occasional exceptions, the periods of Civilisation, and even the societies or sections of society in which civilisation has made the greatest progress, have been the scenes of a most notable sadness and degradation of woman : the Man, all through, more and more calmly assuming that it must be her province to live and work for him ; tending more and more to shut her from the free world and the following of her own bent, into the seclusion of the boudoir and the harem, or down to the drudgery of the hearth ; confining her body, her mind ; playing always upon her sex-nature, accentuating always that—as though she were indeed nought else but sex ; yet furious if her feelings were not always obedient to his desire ; arrogating to himself a masculine licence, yet revenging the least unfaithfulness on her part by casting her out into the scorned life of the prostitute ; and granting her more and more but one choice in life—to be a free woman, and to die, unsexed, in the gutter ; or for creature-comforts and a good name to sell herself, soul and body, into life-long

bondage to a lord whom too soon, alas! she might come to hate.

She, more and more, accepting as inevitable the situation; moving, sad-eyed, to her patient and uncomplaining work; to the narrow sphere and petty details of household labor and life, and to the obscurity of unrecognised cares and interests; filling the world with her myriad nameless unrecorded acts of tenderness and love, of drudgery and daily tendance, of patience and self-effacement, little noticed and less understood; yet all the while with her own impulses and character, her own talents and genius, smothered away and blighted by confinement and neglect; her brain dwarfed; and her outlook on the world marred by all falsity and ignorance. Such has been the fate of woman through the centuries. Till at last, becoming indeed only too well adapted to the external conditions of her life, she has often even mentally lapsed into the chattel and property of the male, and (like the wage-earner) been able only to see her good in clinging for support to the very person who used her for his profit and his pleasure.

And if, like man, Woman had been light-armed for her own defence, it might have been possible to say it was her own fault that she allowed all this to take place; but when we remember that she all the while has

had to bear the great and speechless burden of Sex—to be herself the ark and cradle of the Race down the ages —then we may perhaps understand what a tragedy has lain involved in her destiny. For the fulfilment of sex is a relief and a condensation to the Man. He goes his way, and, so to speak, thinks no more about it. But to the Woman it is the culmination of her life, her profound and secret mission to humanity, of incomparable import and delicacy. It is her momentous burden, which she can never lay aside nor forget—which she must first lift before she can raise herself.

Few probably among men, if any, ever understand the depth and sacredness of the mother-feeling in woman— its joys and hopes, nor its leaden weight of cares and anxieties. The burden of her pregnancy and gestation, the deep inner solicitude, and despondency, as she realises more and more the grave changes that are in progress, the fears that all may not be well, the indrawing and absorption of her life into the life of the child, the increasing effort to attend to anything else, to care for anything else; her willingness even to die if only the child may be born safe: these are things which man —except it be occasionally in his rôle as artist or inventor—does but faintly imagine. Then, later on, the dedication to the young life or lives, the years of daylong and nightlong labor and forethought, in which

the very thought of self is effaced, of tender service for which there is no recognition, nor ever will or can be—except in the far future; the sacrifice of personal interests and expansions in the ever-narrowing round of domestic duty; and in the end the sad wonderment and grievous unfulfilled yearning as one by one the growing boy and girl push their way into the world and disavow their home-ties and dependence; the sundering of heart-strings even as the navel-cord had to be sundered before: for these things, too, Woman can hope but little sympathy and understanding from the other sex.

Yet when we consider that She during all the centuries of her emprisonment and degradation has had to bear this great and sacred burden, has had to discharge this priceless and inviolable trust—while we realise the better how difficult it has been for her to fight for her own independence, we feel all the more acutely perhaps for this very reason the part of callousness and indifference which man has played; and are not without surprise that humanity has indeed survived a period fraught with such danger to its very reproduction and continuance. Far back out of the brows of Greek goddess and Sibyll, and Norse and German seeress and prophetess, over all this petty civilisation look the grand untamed eyes of a primal woman the equal and the mate of man; and in sad plight should we be if we might not

already, lighting up the horizon from East and West and South and North, discern the answering looks of those new-comers who as the period of women's degradation and enslavement is passing away send glances of recognition across the ages to their elder sisters.

For underneath all the warping influences of the period of which we have spoken, and underneath the artificial relationships arising from the sense of property, may we not say that there is a deep and in some sense eternal relation between man and woman which must inevitably assert itself again? To this relation the physiological differences perhaps afford the key. In woman—modern science has shown—the more fundamental and primitive nervous centres, and the great sympathetic and vaso-motor system of nerves generally, are developed to a greater extent than in man; in woman the whole structure and life rallies more closely and obviously round the sexual function than in man; and, as a general rule, in the evolution of the human race, as well as of the lower races, the female is less subject to variation and is more constant to and conservative of the type of the race than the male. With these physiological differences are naturally allied the facts that, of the two, Woman is the more primitive, the more intuitive, the more emotional; the great unconscious and cosmic processes of Nature lie

somehow nearer to her; to her, sex is a deep and sacred instinct, carrying with it a sense of natural purity; nor does she often experience that divorce between the sentiment of Love and the physical passion which is so common with men, and which causes them to be aware of a grossness and a conflict in their own natures; she is, or should be, the interpreter of Love to man, and in some degree his guide in sexual matters. More, since she keeps to the great lines of evolution and is less biassed and influenced by the momentary currents of the day; since her life is bound up with the life of the child; since in a way she is nearer the child herself, and nearer to the savage; it is to her that Man, after his excursions and wanderings, mental and physical, continually tends to return as to his primitive home and resting-place, to restore his balance, to find his centre of life, and to draw stores of energy and inspiration for fresh conquests of the outer world. "In women men find beings who have not wandered so far as they have from the typical life of earth's creatures; women are for men the human embodiments of the restful responsiveness of Nature. To every man, as Michelet has put it, the woman whom he loves is as the Earth was to her legendary son; he has but to fall down and kiss her breast and he is strong again." *

* *Man and Woman*, by Havelock Ellis. Contemporary Science Series.

If it be true that by natural and physiological right Woman stands in some such primitive relationship to Man, then we may expect this relationship to emerge again into clear and reasonable light in course of time; though it does not of course follow that a relationship founded on physiological distinctions is *absolutely* permanent—since these latter may themselves vary to some degree. That a more natural and sensible relation of some kind between the sexes is actually coming to birth, few who care to read the signs of the times can well doubt. For the moment, however, and by way of parenthesis before looking to the future, we have to consider a little more in detail the present position of women under civilisation. Not that the consideration will be altogether gracious and satisfactory, but that it may—we are fain to hope—afford us some hints for the future.

Man's craze for property and individual ownership, to which we have alluded, culminated perhaps not unnaturally in woman—his most precious and beloved object. But the consequence of this was the absurd anomaly that he tried to deprive his dearest mate of her freedom, and to make her, who should have been his heart's delight, his chattel slave. From this radically false position flowed in course of time all manner of other falsities. On the one hand woman was treated to

insincere flattery and rosewater adorations, on the other hand she was condemned to contemptuous bondage and confinement. As Havelock Ellis says, she was looked upon as a cross between an angel and an idiot. And as a cross between an angel and an idiot, and used as such, her character was developed along lines utterly foreign to her true nature — the real woman was lost in a travesty of womanhood. Moreover, by taking possession of her always in the name and for the purposes of sex, and ordering her life and captivity simply from that point of view, man inevitably accentuated her sexual nature in a false direction, over-specialised what was specialised already—*i.e.*, her domestic instinct—and by the confinement of her life and its separation from his own, caused that divergence of interest between the sexes, which too often makes a real sympathy between them almost impossible to attain—and which leads the males and females of civilised society, except when the sex-attraction from time to time compels them as it were to come together, to congregate in separate herds, and to talk languages each almost unintelligible to the other.

As a consequence, and after long centuries of such false position, the female stands to-day deeply and painfully misunderstood, absurdly and painfully misunderstanding herself—her nature turned topsy-turvy, and strained out of its proper bearings—till

the great, grave, beautiful, unself-conscious word Woman has become a symbol for frivolity and degradation, and can, in some quarters, hardly be used without offence. Says the author of the Woman's Question: "I admit there is no room for pharisaical self-laudation here. The bawling mass of *man*kind on a race-course or the stock-exchange is degrading enough in all conscience. Yet this even is hardly so painful as the sight which meets our eyes between three and four in the afternoon in any fashionable London street Hundreds of women—mere dolls—gazing intently into shop-windows at various bits of coloured ribbon. . . . Perhaps nothing is more disheartening than this, except the mob of women in these very same streets between twelve and one at night."

The 'lady,' the household drudge, and the prostitute, are the three main types of woman resulting in our modern civilisation from the process of the past—and it is hard to know which is the most wretched, which is the most wronged, and which is the most unlike that which in her own heart every true woman would desire to be.

In some sense the 'lady' of the period which is just beginning to pass away is the most characteristic product of Commercialism. The sense of Private Property, arising and joining with the 'angel and idiot' theory,

turned Woman more and more—especially of course among the possessing classes—into an emblem of possession—a mere doll, an empty idol, a brag of the man's exclusive right in the sex—till at last, as her vain splendors increased and her real usefulness diminished, she ultimated into the 'perfect lady.' But let every woman who piques and preens herself to the fulfilment of this ideal in her own person, remember what is the cost and what is the meaning of her quest: the covert enslavement to, and the covert contempt of Man.

The instinct of helpful personal service is so strong in women, and such a deep-rooted part of their natures, that to be treated as a mere target for other people's worship and service—especially when this is tainted with insincerity—must be at heart most obnoxious to them. To think that women exist by hundreds and hundreds of thousands to-day, women with hearts and hands formed for love and helpfulness, who are brought up as 'ladies' and condemned to spend their lives doing next to nothing but receive the specious and often contemptuous homage of men (with its accompaniment of idiotic platitudes), and the unloving and wage-bought services of domestics, makes one shudder as at the contemplation of some vast mass of suffering. The modern 'gentleman' is bad enough, but the 'lady' of bourgeois-dom, literally —too literally—" crucified 'twixt a smile and whimper"—

prostituted to a life which in her heart she hates—with its petty ideals, its narrow horizon, and its empty honors —is indeed a pitiful spectacle.

In Baronial times the household centred round the Hall, where the baron sat supreme; to-day it centres round the room where the lady reigns. The 'with' is withdrawn from the withdrawing-room, and that apartment has become the most important of all. Yet there is an effect of mockery in the homage paid to the new sovereign; and, as far as her rule is actual, a doubt whether she is really qualified yet for the position. The contrast between the two societies, the Feudal and the Commercial, is not inaptly represented by this domestic change. The former society was rude and rough, but generous and straightforward; the latter is polished and nice, but full of littleness and *finesse*. The Drawing-room, with its feeble manners and effects of curtains and embroidery, gives its tone to our lives now-a-days. But we look forward to a time when this room also will cease to be the centre of the house, and another—perhaps the Common-room—will take its place.

Below a certain level in society—the distinctively commercial—there are no drawing-rooms. Among the working masses, where the woman is of indispensable importance in daily life, and is not sequestered as an idol, there is no room specially set apart for her worship

—a curious change takes place in her nominal position, and whereas in the supernal sphere she sits in state and has her tea and bread and butter brought to her by obsequious males, in the cottage the men take their ease and are served by the women. The customs of the cottage, however, are rooted in a natural division of labor by which the man undertakes the outdoor, and the woman the indoor work; and there is, I think, quite as much real respect shown to her here as in the drawing-room.

In the cottage, nevertheless, the unfortunate one falls into the second pit that is prepared for her—that of the household drudge; and here she leads a life which, if it has more honesty and reality in it than that of the 'lady,' is one of abject slavery. Few men again realise, or trouble themselves to realise, what a life this of the working house-wife is. They are accustomed to look upon their own employment, whatever it may be, as 'work' (perhaps because it brings with it 'wages'); the woman's they regard as a kind of pastime. They forget what monotonous drudgery it really means, and yet what incessant forethought and care; they forget that the woman has no eight hours day, that her work is always staring her in the face, and waiting for her, even on into the night; that the body is wearied, and the mind narrowed down, "scratched to death by rats and mice" in a perpetual round of petty cares. For not

only does civilisation and multifarious invention (including smoke) make the burden of domestic life immensely complex, but the point is that each housewife has to sustain this burden to herself in lonely effort. What a sight, in any of our great towns, to enter into the cottages or tenements which form the endless rows of tuburban streets, and to find in each one a working wife struggling alone in semi-darkness and seclusion with the toils of an entire separate household—with meals to be planned and provided, with bread to be baked, clothes to be washed and mended, children to be kept in order, a husband to be humored, and a house to be swept and dusted; herself wearied and worried, debilitated with confinement and want of fresh air, and low-spirited for want of change and society! How sad the waste of labor involved in all these separated households, and the dreariness of the lives that sustain them, even if to that dreariness there be not added the neglect of a callous husband!

There remains the third alternative for women; nor can it be wondered at that some deliberately choose a life of prostitution as their only escape from the existence of the lady or the drudge. Yet what a choice it is! On the one hand is the caged Woman, and on the other hand is the free: and which to choose? "How can there be a doubt," says one, "surely freedom is always

best." Then there falls a hush. "Ah!" says society, pointing with its finger, "but a free *Woman!*"

And yet is it possible for Woman ever to be worthy her name, unless she is free?

To-day, or up to to-day, just as the wage-worker has had no means of livelihood except by the sale of his bodily labor, so woman has had no means of livelihood except by the surrender of her bodily sex. She could dispose of it to one man for life, and have in return the respect of society and the caged existence of the lady or the drudge, or she could sell it night by night and be a 'free woman,' scorned of the world and portioned to die in the gutter. In either case (if she really thinks about the matter at all) she must lose her self-respect. What a choice, what a frightful choice!—and this has been the fate of Woman for how many centuries?

If as a consequence of this treatment that she has undergone, and of this lopsided relationship between her and Man, Woman has suffered degradation, moral or mental or physical—there is little doubt that Man has suffered an equal degradation. Nothing I think can be more clear—and this I believe should be taken as the basis of any discussion on the relation of the sexes—than that whatever injures the one sex injures the other; and that whatever defects or partialities may be found in the one must from the nature of the case be tallied by

corresponding defects and partialities in the other. The two halves of the human race are complementary to each other, and it is useless for one to attempt to glorify itself at the expense of the other. As in Olive Schreiner's allegory of Woman ("Three Dreams in a Desert"), man and woman are bound together by a vital band, and the one cannot move a step in advance of the other.

Looking for a moment at the special and, we may fairly hope, temporary defects on the two sides, inbred through this long period by the false property-relation subsisting between them, we may characterise these defects as brutality and conceit on the one hand, and *finesse* and subtlety on the other. If man, as Owner, has tended to become arrogant and callous and egoistic, woman as the owned has only too naturally tended to become slavish and crafty and unreal. The one thing follows from the other.

As a matter of fact, and allowing that sweeping generalisations of this kind are open to a good many exceptions, we do find (at any rate in the British Isles) a most wonderful and celestial indifference to anything but their own affairs amongst the "lords of creation," which easily branches out at times, on the one hand into sheer Egoism, and on the other into sheer Brutality—an indifference so ingrained and constitutional that it is rarely conscious of itself, and which assumes quite easily

and naturally that the weaker sex exists for the purpose of playing the foil, so to speak, to the chief actor in life's drama. Nor does the fact that this indifference is tempered, from time to time, by a little gallantry afford much consolation—as may be imagined—to the woman who perceives that the gallantry is inspired by nothing more than a passing sex-desire.

On the other hand, the woman has not been left without her defence, and has in consequence of her position developed (through scores of generations) an unrivalled power of *finesse*, by which, underneath man's indifference, she can pursue her own purposes, often through the most difficult passes, without ever exposing her hand. This, combined with the glamor of her sex, of which she is often an accomplished mistress, gives her an extraordinary sway, and enables her many a time to twirl her would-be master about her little finger! I say finesse, because the thing with the mass of women may be said to take the form of a subtle instinct of concealed design, which is so perfectly natural with them, and in a sense justifiable (since they have no other weapon), that it is not really characterised by any more unmannerly term—more especially as this instinct may often be seen in operation where the design is quite reasonable and of general utility. Nevertheless great as the power of finesse may be, and admissible as its use occasionally for

large and noble purposes, it is a dangerous weapon—and all the more so on account of the profound distrust it is liable to breed, when once its double edge is clearly seen. Possibly this is the reason why women distrust each other so much more than men distrust each other. Certainly one of the rarest of God's creatures is a truly undesigning female, but—when dowered with intellect such as might seem to justify it in being designing—one of the most admirable and beautiful!

Looking a little deeper, and below the superficial contrast which an unsatisfactory relation between the sexes has doubtless created, one seems to discern some of those more vital and deep-rooted differentiations spoken of on an earlier page. It is a commonly received opinion that woman tends more to intuition and man to logic;* and certainly the male mind seems better able to deal with abstractions and generalisations, and the female mind with the personal and the detailed and the concrete. And while this difference may be in part attributable to the artificial confinement of women to the domestic sphere, there is probably something more organic in it than that. At any rate it gives to Woman some of her best qualities — a quick and immediate perception, appreciation of character, tact, and a kind of

* Physiologically speaking a certain excess of affectability and excitability in women over men seems to be distinctly traceable.

artistic sense in the ordering of her own life, so that you do not see the tags and unraveled ends which appear in man's conduct. While the man is blundering about, fighting with himself, hesitating, doubting, weighing, trying vainly to co-ordinate all the elements of his nature, the woman (often no doubt in a smaller sphere) moves serene and prompt to her ends. Her actions are characterised by grace and finality; she is more at unity with herself; and she has the inestimable advantage of living in the world of persons—which may well seem so much more important and full of interest than that of things.

On the other hand, this want of the power of generalisation has made it difficult for woman (at any rate up to to-day) to emerge from a small circle of interests, and to look at things from the point of view of public advantage and good. While her sympathies for individuals are keen and quick, abstract and general ideas such as those of Justice, Truth, and the like have been difficult of appreciation to her; and her deficiency in logic has made it almost impossible to act upon her through the brain. A man, if he is on the wrong tack, can be argued with; but with a woman of this type, if her motives are nefarious, there is no means of changing them by appeal to her reason, or to the general sense of Justice and Right—and unless controlled by the stronger

sway of a determined personal will (of a man) her career is liable to be pretty bad.

Generally it will be admitted, as we are dealing with points of difference between the sexes, that as far as moral qualities are concerned, Man has developed the more active, and Woman the more passive virtues; and it is pretty obvious, here too, that this difference is not only due to centuries of social inequality and of property-marriage, but roots back in some degree to the very nature of their respective sexual functions. That there are permanent complementary distinctions between the male and female, dating first perhaps from sex, and thence spreading over the whole natures, physical mental and moral, of each, no one can reasonably doubt. These complementary distinctions have however, we contend, been strangely accentuated and exaggerated during the historic period—till at last a point of maximum divergence and absolute misunderstanding has been reached—from which we are happily already receding. Having given in this first part of the paper some attention to the mutual misapprehensions and mutilations which have thus arisen, we may consider in the following part how the growth of a real equality will perhaps cause these to gradually disappear again in favour of a healthier and happier relation between the sexes.

II.

It will be pretty clear, from what has been said, that the liberation of Woman from her position of dependence on Man is at present the very next step in her line of progress, and that her status is not likely to be improved until she is able to face man on an equality; to find, self-balanced, her natural relation to him; and to dispose of herself and of her sex perfectly freely, and not as a thrall must do. Doubtless if man were an ideal creature his mate might be secure of equal and considerate treatment from him without having to insist upon an absolute economic independence; but as that is only too obviously not the case there is nothing left for her to-day but to unfold the warflag of her 'rights,' and (dull and tiresome as it may be) to go through a whole weary round of battles till peace is concluded again upon a better understanding.

Yet it must never be forgotten that nothing short of large social changes, stretching beyond the sphere of women only, can bring about the desired and complete emancipation. Not till our whole commercial system, with its barter and sale of human labor and human love for gain, is done away, and not till a whole new code of ideals and customs of life has come in, will

women really be free. They must remember that their cause is also the cause of the oppressed laborer over the whole earth, and the laborer must remember that his cause is theirs.

And first of all, and going to the root of the matter, since woman's greatest and incomparable function is Motherhood, it will be understood that a sane maternity is the indispensable condition of her future advance; not meaning of course that her functions should be in any way narrowed down to that of maternity, nor suggesting that maternity itself when properly fulfilled, does not really involve the broadest and largest culture —but simply taking perfect motherhood as the necessary and obvious start-point of any adequate new conception in the matter. Perhaps this might seem to some only too obvious; yet when for a moment we glance around at the current ideals, when we see what Whitman calls "the incredible holds and webs of silliness, millinery and every kind of dyspeptic depletion" in which women themselves live, when we see the absolute want of training for motherhood and the increasing physical incapacity for it, and even the feminine censure of those who pass through the ordeal too easily, we begin to realise how little the present notion of what woman should be is associated with the healthy fulfilment of her most perfect work. A woman capable at all

points, to bear children, to guard them, to teach them, to turn them out strong and healthy citizens of the great world, stands at the farthest remove from the finnikin doll or the meek drudge whom man by a kind of false sexual selection has through many centuries evolved as his ideal.

The nervous and sexual systems of women to-day, ruined among the rich by a life and occupations which stimulate the emotional sensibilities without ever giving the strength and hardiness which flow from healthy and regular industry, and often ruined among the poor by excessive labor carried on under most unhealthy conditions, make true wifehood and motherhood things almost unknown. "Injudicious training", says Bebel, "miserable social conditions (food, dwelling, occupation) produce weak, bloodless, nervous beings, incapable of fulfilling the duties of matrimony. The consequences are menstrual troubles and disturbances in the various organs connected with sexual functions, rendering maternity dangerous or impossible. Instead of a healthy, cheerful companion, a capable mother, a helpmate equal to the calls made upon her activity, the husband has a nervous excitable wife, permanently under the doctor's hands, and too fragile to bear the slightest draught or noise."

We say then that no effectual progress for Woman

is possible until this question of her capacity for maternity is fairly faced — for healthy maternity whether in physical mental or moral respects— involving of course the thorough exercise and development of the body, a life far more in the open air than at present, some amount of regular manual work (for all), yet good opportunities of rest when needful, a knowledge of the laws of health and physiology, and such wider training in mental outlook and self-reliance and nature-hardihood as may be feasible; and that once this, together with her economic independence, is conceded, Woman will spring naturally into quite a different position from heretofore—as the equal, the mate, and the comrade of man—fully equipped to meet him on level terms, to take up her own voluntary relation towards him, and to engage alongside of him in labors at least equal in importance to his.

Before any such new conception we are fain to see that the poor little pinched ideal of the 'lady,' which has ruled society so long, will fade away into distance and obscurity. It is possible indeed that before long women will themselves discountenance the mock salutations and heroic politenesses of the conventional male as a mere veneer concealing the odious fact of their own real servitude, and prefer sheer bluntness if only it be the

sign of honesty. What, it may be asked, do they think to-day of the mockery of the doffed hat—with its suggestion either of a homage which is not felt, or of a deference to weakness and incapacity which can only be regarded as a sneer? What do they think of the unwritten law which condemns them, if occupying any place in society, to bridle in their chins and use an affected speech in order that it may be patent to everybody that they are *not* free; which forbids natural and spontaneous gesture and expression as unbecoming and suspicious—and indeed in any public place as liable to the attention of the policeman? What do they think of the perpetual lies under which they live—as to their selves which they conceal, as to their sexual needs which must never be spoken of, as to their actual relations to their husbands, and of their husbands to them? And yet there are thousands of women of these classes who long, if only for once, to meet a man on the simple basis of equality and honesty, to brush away the cobwebs of concealment and of insincere flattery, and to be, as two men-friends or two women-friends might be, open and equal comrades in the great battle of life.

As a matter of fact—and an encouraging fact—it is evident that there are to-day quite a number of women who *are* rising out of the 'lady' and leaving that ideal behind. I take it that—as with the 'gentleman'—not

much good is to be expected from this section of folk as long as they remain in the toils of mere high-class philanthropy. Yet to deliberately reject the mark of society's acceptance and to do things which are neither 'lady-like' nor 'gentlemanly' seems hard—especially for the lady. The thing however has to be done, and short of it little or nothing can be done. It is the ordeal which everyone who wishes to win the honorable title of Man or Woman in the world's Modern Chivalry must encounter and pass through.

That a new code of manners between the sexes, founded not on covert lust but on open and mutual helpfulness, must come in, is obvious enough. The cry of equality need not like a red rag infuriate the Philistine bull. That woman is in general muscularly weaker than man, and that there are certain kinds of effort, even mental, for which she is less fitted—as there are other kinds of effort for which she is more fitted—may easily be granted, but this only means, in the language of all good manners, that there are special ways in which men can assist women, as there are special ways in which women can assist men. Anything which goes beyond this, and the friendly exchange of equal services, and which assumes, in the conventionalities of the private household or the public place, that the female claims a general indulgence

(because of her general incapacity) is an offence—against the encouragement of which women themselves will no doubt be on their guard.

I say there are healthy signs of revolt on the part of some of the lady class—revolt long delayed, but now spreading all along the line. When, however, we come to the second type of woman mentioned in the preceding pages, the drudge, we—naturally enough—do not find much conscious movement. The life of the household drudge is too like that of a slave, too much consumed in mere toil, too little illuminated by any knowledge, for her to rise of herself to any other conception of existence. Nevertheless it is not difficult to see that general and social changes are working to bring about her liberation also. Improved house-construction, public bakeries and laundries, and so forth, and, what is much more important, a more rational and simple and healthful notion of food and furniture, are tending very largely to reduce the labors of Housework and Cookery; and conservative though women are in their habits, when these changes are brought to their doors, they cannot but see the advantage of them. Public institutions too are more and more taking over the responsibilities and the cost of educating and rearing children; and even here and there we may discern a drift towards the amalgamation of

households, which by introducing a common life and division of labor among the women-folk will probably do much to cheer and lighten their lot. None of these changes, however, will be of great use unless or until they wake the overworked woman herself to see and insist on her rights to a better life, and until they force from the man a frank acknowledgment of her claim. And surely here and there the man himself will do something to educate his mate to this point. We see no reason indeed why he should not assist in some part of the domestic work, and thus contribute his share of labor and intelligence to the conduct of the house; nor why the woman—being thus relieved—should not occasionally, and when desirable, find salaried work outside, and so contribute to the maintenance of the family, and to her own security and sense of independence. The over-differentiation of the labors of the sexes to-day is at once a perpetuation of the servitude of woman and a cause of misunderstanding between her and man, and of lack of interest in each other's doings.

The third type of woman, the prostitute, provides us with that question which—according to Bebel—is the sphinx-riddle that modern society cannot solve, and yet which unsolved threatens society's destruction. The commercial prostitution of love is the last outcome of

our whole social system, and its most dangerous downfall. It flaunts in our streets, it hides itself in the garment of respectability under the name of matrimony, it eats in actual physical disease and death right through our hearts; it is fed by the oppression and the ignorance of women, by their poverty and denied means of livelihood, and by the hypocritical puritanism which forbids them by millions not only to gratify but even to speak of their natural desires; and it is encouraged by the callousness of an age which has accustomed men to buy and sell for money every most precious thing—even the life-long labor of their brothers, therefore why not also the very bodies of their sisters?

Here there is no solution *except* the freedom of woman —which means of course also the freedom of the masses of the people, men and women, and the ceasing altogether of economic slavery. There is no solution which will not include the redemption of the terms 'free woman' and 'free love' to their *true* and rightful significance. Let every woman whose heart bleeds for the sufferings of her sex, hasten to declare herself, and to constitute herself as far as she possibly can, a free woman. Let her accept the term with all the odium that belongs to it; let her insist on her right to speak, dress, think, act, and above all to use her sex, as she deems best; let her face the scorn and the ridicule; let

her 'lose her own life' if she likes; assured that only so can come deliverance, and that only when the free woman is honored will the prostitute cease to exist. And let every man who really would respect his counterpart, entreat her also to act so; let him never by word or deed tempt her to grant as a bargain what can only be precious as a gift; let him see her with pleasure stand a little aloof; let him help her to gain her feet; so at last, by what slight sacrifices on his part such a course may involve, will it dawn upon him that he has gained a real companion and helpmate on life's journey.

The whole evil of commercial prostitution arises out of the domination of Man in matters of sex. Better indeed were a Saturnalia of *free* men and women than the spectacle which as it is our great cities present at night. Here in Sex, the women's instincts are, as a rule, so clean, so direct, so well-rooted in the needs of the race, that except for man's domination they would scarcely have suffered this perversion. Sex in man is an unorganised passion, an individual need or impetus; but in woman it may more properly be termed a constructive instinct, with the larger signification that that involves. Even more than man should woman be 'free' to work out the problem of her sex-relations as may commend itself best to her —hampered as little as possible by legal, conventional,

or economic considerations, and relying chiefly on her own native sense and tact in the matter. Once thus free—free from the mere cash-nexus to a husband, from the money-slavery of the streets, from the nameless terrors of social opinion, and from the threats of the choice of perpetual virginity or perpetual bondage—would she not indeed choose her career (whether that of wife and mother, or that of free companion, or one of single blessedness) far better for herself than it is chosen *for* her to-day—regarding really in some degree the needs of society, and the welfare of children, and the sincerity and durability of her relations to her lovers, and less the petty motives of profit and of fear.

The point is that the whole conception of a nobler Womanhood for the future has to proceed candidly from this basis of her complete freedom as to the disposal of her sex, and from the healthy conviction that, with whatever individual aberrations, she will on the whole use that freedom rationally and well. And surely this —in view too of some decent education of the young on sexual matters—is not too great a demand to make on our faith in woman. If it is, then indeed we are undone —for short of this we can only retain women in servitude, and society in its form of the hell on earth which it largely is to-day.

Refreshing therefore in its way is the spirit of revolt which is spreading amongst women. Let us hope such revolt will continue. If it lead here and there to strained or false situations, or to temporary misunderstandings—still, declared enmity is better than unreal acquiescence. Too long have women acted the part of mere appendages to the male, suppressing their own individuality and fostering his self-conceit. In order to have souls of their own they must free themselves, and greatly by their own efforts: they must learn to fight. Whitman in his poem "A woman waits for me" draws a picture of a woman who stands in the sharpest possible contrast with the feeble bourgeois ideal—a woman who can "swim, row, ride, wrestle, shoot, run, strike, retreat, defend herself," &c.; and Bebel, in his book on Woman, while pointing out that in Sparta, "where the greatest attention was paid to the physical development of both sexes, boys and girls went about naked till they had reached the age of puberty, and were trained together in bodily exercises, games and wrestling," complains that nowadays "the notion that women require strength, courage and resolution is regarded as very heterodox." But the truth is that qualities of courage and independence are not agreeable in a slave, and that is why man during all these centuries has consistently discountenanced them

—till at last the female herself has come to consider them 'unwomanly.' Yet this last epithet is absurd; for if tenderness is the crown and glory of woman, nothing can be more certain than that true tenderness is only found in strong and courageous natures; the tenderness of a servile person is no tenderness at all.

It has not escaped the attention of thinkers on these subjects that the rise of Women into freedom and larger social life here alluded to—and already indeed indicated by the march of events—is likely to have a profound influence on the future of our race. It is pointed out that among most of the higher animals, and indeed among many of the early races of mankind, the males have been selected by the females on account of their prowess or superior strength or beauty, and this has led to the evolution in the males and in the race at large of a type which (in a dim and unconscious manner) was the ideal of the female. But as soon as in the history of mankind the property-love set in, and woman became the chattel of man, this action ceased. Woman, being no longer free, could not possibly choose man, but rather the opposite took place, and man began to select woman for the characteristics pleasing to *him*. Woman now adorned herself to gratify his taste, and the female type and consequently the type of the whole race have been correspondingly affected. With the return of woman to

freedom the ideal of the female may again resume its sway. It is possible indeed that the more dignified and serious attitude of women towards sex may give to sexual selection when exercised by them a nobler influence than when exercised by the males. Anyhow it is not difficult to see that women really free would never countenance for their mates the many mean and unclean types of men who to-day seem to have things all their own way, nor consent to have children by such men; nor is it difficult to imagine that the feminine influence might thus sway to the evolution of a more manly and dignified race than has been disclosed in these last days of commercial civilisation!

That—to come to practical matters—the rise of women will mean the active participation of some of them in political life is pretty clear. Most of those who are freeing themselves—often with serious struggles—from the 'lady' chrysalis are fired with an ardent social enthusiasm. Indeed in that stratum of life there is a good deal more real social enthusiasm among the women than among the men—while among the working masses the balance is decidedly the other way. And of these liberationist women a few—though probably only a few—will take to political life. Still the influence of a few will perhaps suffice for their purpose—that of freeing the sex from legal

disabilities and giving it due voice in all matters which specially concern itself.

That women should be conservative (even in a grand sense) in their general habits and instincts goes as we have seen with their sex, which also demands that they should accept and build up rather than (like men) remodel and destroy. A woman has a tremendous work to perform—the production and rearing of children—and like all artists she desires to have the conditions under which she is to work settled, not in a state of constant flux. That she has contributed but little original advance hitherto in most departments in life—that even such things as dressmaking and cookery, which might be thought specialities of hers, are chiefly led, down to the present day, by the invention and research of men—does not by any means prove that woman will always remain so merely stationary. As she emerges from the blank thraldom of the past it is abundantly probable that her energies will find outlet in more varied ways—even if not to the same degree as in the case of men.

But after all it will probably appear and be recognised, as time goes on, that her great function (and there can be none greater) is race-propagation and the care of the young; only with her participation in the free social life these most important of human labors will be carried on with a degree of conscious intelligence impossible before,

and which will raise them from the fulfilment of a mere instinct to the completion of a splendid social purpose. To save the souls of children as well as their bodies, to raise heroic as well as prosperous citizens, will be the desire and the work of the mothers of our race.*

It will perhaps be said that after going about to show (as in the earlier part of this paper) the deficiency of women hitherto in the matter of the generalising faculty, it is somewhat inconsistent to express any great hope that they will ever sincerely and in permanent and wide degree take an active interest in the general social life to which they belong; but indeed the answer to this is that they are already beginning to do so. The social enthusiasm and activity shown by women in Britain, Russia, and the United States is so great and well-rooted that it is impossible to believe it a mere ephemeral event; and though in the older of these countries it is at present confined to the more wealthy classes, we can augur from that—according to a well-known principle—that it will in time spread downwards to the women of the nation.

* As to the maternal teaching of children, it must be confessed that it has, during these latter times, been most dismal. Whether among the masses or the classes the idea has been first and foremost to impress upon them the necessity of sliding through life as comfortably as possible, and the parting word to the boy leaving home to launch into the great world has seldom risen to a more heroic strain than "Don't forget your flannels!"

Important as is the tendency of women in the countries mentioned to higher education and brain development, I think it is probable that the widening and socialisation of their interests will not take place so much through mere study of books and the passing of examinations in political economy and other sciences, as through the extended actual experience which the life of the day is bringing to them. Certainly the book-studies are important and must not be neglected; but above all is it imperative (and men, if they are to have any direct sway in the future destinies of the other sex, must look to it) that women, so long confined to the narrowest mere routine and limited circle of domestic life, should see and get experience, all they can, of the actual world. The theory, happily now exploding, of keeping them 'innocent' through sheer ignorance partakes too much of the 'angel and idiot' view. To see the life of slum and palace and workshop, to enter into the trades and professions, to become doctors, nurses, and so forth, to have to look after themselves and to hold their own as against men, to travel, to meet with sexual experience, to work together in trade-unions, to join in social and political uprisings and rebellions, etc., is what women want just now. And it is evident enough that at any rate among the more prosperous sections in this country such a movement

is going on apace. If the existence of the enormous hordes of unattached females that we find living on interest and dividends to-day is a blemish from a Socialistic point of view; if we find them on the prowl all over the country, filling the theatres and concert-rooms and public entertainments in the proportion of three to one male, besetting the trains, swarming on to the tops of the 'buses, making speeches at street corners, blocking the very pavements in the front of fashionable shops, we must not forget that for the objects we have just sketched, even this class is going the most direct way to work, and laying in stores of experience, which will make it impossible for it ever to return to the petty life of times gone by.

At the last, and after centuries of misunderstanding and association of triviality and superficiality with the female sex, it will perhaps dawn upon the world that the truth really lies in an opposite direction—that, in a sense, there is something more deeplying fundamental and primitive in the woman nature than in that of the man; that instead of being the over-sensitive hysterical creature that civilisation has too often made her, she is essentially of calm large acceptive and untroubled temperament. "Her shape arises," says Walt Whitman,

> "She less guarded than ever, yet more guarded than ever,
> The gross and soil'd she moves among do not make her
> gross and soil'd,

She knows the thoughts as she passes, nothing is concealed
from her,
She is none the less considerate or friendly therefor,
She is the best belov'd, it is without exception; she has no
reason to fear, and she does not fear."

The Greek goddesses look down and across the ages to the very outposts beyond civilisation; and already from far America, Australasia, Africa, Norway, Russia, as even in our midst from those who have crossed the border-line of all class and caste, glance forth the features of a grander type—fearless and untamed—the primal merging into the future Woman; who, combining broad sense with sensibility, the passion for Nature with the love of Man, and commanding indeed the details of life, yet risen out of all localism and convention, shall undo the bands of death which encircle the present society, and open for us the doors to a new and a wider life.

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